

# The Hallucinogen PMA:



## Dancing With Death

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## **Overview**

Paramethoxyamphetamine (PMA), also known as 4-methoxyamphetamine, is an illicit, synthetic hallucinogen that has stimulant effects similar to other clandestinely manufactured amphetamine derivatives like MDMA (Ecstasy).

## **Effects**

PMA is a potent and potentially lethal synthetic hallucinogen which was placed into Schedule I of the Controlled Substances Act in 1973. The drug has been sold in tablet, capsule and powder form, and its appearance and cost are comparable to MDMA. Common street names for PMA are “Death” and “Mitsubishi Double-Stack.”

The effects associated with PMA vary depending on the dose and whether other drugs are present.

PMA typically is administered orally in pill or capsule form. PMA powder, although uncommon, may be inhaled or injected to accelerate the response. Ingesting a dose of less than 50 milligrams – usually one pill or capsule – without other drugs or alcohol, induces symptoms reminiscent of MDMA.

Such effects include increased pulse rate and blood pressure, increased and labored respiration, elevated body temperature, erratic eye movements, muscle spasms, nausea, and heightened visual stimulation.

Doses over 50 milligrams are considered potentially lethal, especially when taken with other drugs such as amphetamine derivatives, cannabis, cocaine, prescription medications like fluoxetine (Prozac), and alcohol. Higher doses can produce cardiac arrhythmia and arrest, breathing problems, pulmonary congestion, renal failure, hyperthermia, vomiting, convulsions, coma and death.

## **Abuse/Availability**

In 1973, PMA was produced by clandestine laboratory facilities in Canada. PMA manufactured by these operations appeared in limited areas of Canada and the United States.

During that time, three deaths were suspected and two deaths were determined to be associated with PMA abuse in the United States. Eight deaths in Canada were attributed to PMA abuse. Federal, state and local forensic laboratories in Georgia, Kansas, Missouri, and the Centre of Forensic Science in Toronto, Canada, confirmed that PMA contributed to those deaths.

Since May 2000, three deaths in Illinois and seven deaths in Florida were associated with PMA ingestion. Since mid-2000, PMA also has been associated with four deaths in Europe. Austria, Denmark, and Germany reported that the victims died after consuming what they believed to be Ecstasy, but was later identified as PMA.

The drug is available illicitly at nightclubs and rave parties where it is generally sold as MDMA. In fact, dealers and purchasers may be unaware that they are selling or buying PMA. Since 1994, it has

been associated with approximately 12 deaths. Forensic science centers confirmed that most of the overdose victims ingested toxic amounts of PMA.

## **Production**

PMA is produced legally in the United States for limited commercial applications. A small quantity also is allocated for Schedule I scientific research.

The illicit form of PMA is produced in clandestine laboratories. Although PMA can be manufactured by several methods, the method used depends largely upon the availability of certain precursors. The exact synthesis procedure recently used to manufacture the PMA found in Florida, Illinois, Michigan, Virginia and Canada is still unknown.

The likelihood that PMA is inadvertently produced during the manufacture of MDMA is highly unlikely.

To date, four clandestine PMA laboratories have been seized worldwide; in Toronto, Canada, in 1973; in Germany in 1991; and, in 1999, two laboratories in Northern Germany.

## **Distribution**

Illicit PMA distributors in the United States have targeted dealers primarily at rave clubs. Dealers may be unaware that they are buying or selling PMA rather than other club drugs like MDMA. The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) along with state and local authorities are currently attempting to determine if there is any connection among the PMA samples recently identified in Canada, Europe, and the United States.

Drug exhibits acquired by the DEA in its criminal investigations are routinely sent to DEA laboratories for analysis. DEA forensic chemists analyze such drug exhibits for the presence of a wide variety of controlled substances, including PMA.

## **Outlook PMA: Cause for Concern**

The increasing popularity associated with designer drugs increases the risk that users may inadvertently ingest substances such as PMA, which is similar in appearance to MDMA but is more toxic. The continued presence of PMA in Australia and its recent appearance in Canada, Europe and the United States are causes for concern that PMA will be associated with additional overdoses and deaths. The DEA is actively conducting investigations in order to identify the source of production and distribution networks.

*This report was prepared by the DEA Intelligence Division, Domestic Strategic Unit, with the assistance of the Drug and Chemical Evaluation Section, Office of Diversion Control.*